(d) As per the detailed verification made by the Assessing Officer, there are only 41 refund claims pending over one year in Ward 40(4), New Delhi.

(e) The pendency of 41 refund cases is due to factors attributable to assesses like quoting of wrong PAN/TAN and in this regard, the assessing officer has issued deficiency letters to the assesses. The action plan of the Government to address this issue is by adopting various methods to ensure quick issue of refunds in all cases where due. The actions taken are by way of directions to the field formations to dispose off all cases by processing of returns within four months of the filing of return and out of these, the refund returns are to be accorded top priority first and thereafter, the other cases are to be taken up. Further the verification of the TDS in cases involving refund upto Rs. 25,000/- has been waived to expedite the early issuance of refunds in comparatively low value cases.

Revision in age limit for senior citizens

2373. SHRI DHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the age limit for senior citizen for the purpose of grant of higher rate of interest in Banks and lower fare in Rail reservation is 60 years;

(b) if so, what are the reasons that the said limit in 65 years for the purpose of Income Tax calculations or rebates thereon;

(c) whether Government proposes to revise the age limit and make the definition of Senior Citizen uniform for all purpose;

(d) if so, by when; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The qualifying age limit of 65 years for senior citizens has been adopted for Income-tax purpose, keeping in view the income earning capacity of this class of persons as well as the revenue outgo due to the enhanced exemption limit and other deductions.

(c) No such proposal is under consideration at present.

(d) Not applicable.

(e) The variation in the age limit for senior citizens among Central Government, Ministries or Departments in respect of grant of concessions or facilities is due to the difference in the respective purposes for which such concessions are granted.

Burden of Sixth Pay Commission on public exchequer

2374. SHRI RAHUL BAJAJ: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) what is going to be the annual burden of the Sixth Pay Commission on the Central and State Exchequers during the financial year 2009-10; and

(b) whether the number of Government employees would be reduced?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) During the financial year 2009-10, the burden of Sixth Pay Commission on the Central Exchequer, including arrears, is likely to be approximately Rs. 36,000 crore. The burden in respect of State Governments will depend on the manner in which the recommendations of Sixth Pay Commission are adopted by the States.

(b) No proposal in this regard is under consideration at present.

Fall in foreign exchange reserves

2375. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the country's Central Bank has seen its foreign exchange reserves shrink more than 63 billion dollars in less than six months as well as our exports slumping;

(b) whether it is a fact that the country's forex reserves which touched as high as 316 billion dollars on May 23 started falling at an alarming pace and on October, 31 stood at 253 billion dollars;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(d) what remedial steps Government has taken so far to minimize the draw down on reserves indicating what efforts are under way to revive exports growth also?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) to (c) The foreign exchange reserves (including gold, Special Drawing Rights and Reserve Tranche Position in the I.M.F. was placed at US $ 316.2 billion on May 23, 2008. With the deepening of the global financial crisis in September 2008, there has been a withdrawal of US dollar investments/funds from global markets, including India to some extent resulting in the appreciation of US dollar against major world currencies. The exchange rate of the rupee *vis-á-vis* US dollar had depreciated sharply in October, 2008 breaching the Rs. 50 Mark. While exports grew robustly at 29.5 per cent during—April-August 2008, there was deceleration in October, 2008 (10.4 per cent) and a decline in October, 2008 (-12.1 per cent) on account of a spike in export growth in October, 2007. However, growth in exports for April-October, 2008 is at 23.7 per cent over the level in April-October, 2007. This also contributed to the tight supply conditions in the foreign exchange market. For maintaining orderly conditions and to augment foreign currency liquidity in the foreign exchange market. For maintaining orderly conditions and to augment foreign currency liquidity in the foreign exchange market, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) intervened through sale of US dollars. Thus due to the cumulative effect of the sale of US dollars by RBI and the valuation loss arising from the appreciation of US dollars, the foreign exchange reserves declined to a level of US $ 252.9 billion on October 31, 2008 and further to a level of US $ 245.9 billion on December 5, 2008.